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ABSTRACT

A total of 276 respondents, who were faculty members in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, completed questionnaires. These respondents were county extension agents in agriculture, home economics, and administration. The objectives of the study were to determine (1) the relative importance of certain identified tasks of supervisors and how well these tasks are being performed, and (2) how the various Ohio Cooperative Extension Service faculty groups perceive the importance and performance of the various tasks expected of the supervisors. Conclusions are: (1) The importance and performance of supervisory tasks were perceived quite differently by groups of the Extension Service faculty when grouped by: position of employment, tenure, age, level of educational accomplishment, and subject matter major of the most advanced degree attained; (2) Extension faculty consistently view the importance of supervisory tasks higher than the performance of these tasks. (CK)

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ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF SUPERVISORY TASK IMPORTANCE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE OHIO COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract by:

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Introduction

This study has important implications affecting the function and role of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service supervisor. Improved understanding of the supervisory role can be helpful to Extension faculty as they continue to adjust to change.

The most significant application will occur as supervisors capitalize on those specific findings of this study which relate to the varying faculty group perceptions of task importance and performance. Adjustment of supervisory efforts to help specific faculty groups increase their appreciation of the importance of individual tasks, or for increased supervisory emphasis on performance of individual tasks will be the obvious opportunities for change.

Two-hundred and seventy-six respondents completed questionnaires. The respondents included 83 county Extension agents, agriculture; 76 county Extension agents, home economics; 60 county Extension agents, 4-H; 34 area Extension agents; 11 administrators; and 12 supervisors. This included all but 9 county Extension agents on the faculty at the time the instrument was administered. From a practical view, the respondents were the population of the study. Responses from those faculty members with less than one year of service were not included in the analysis.

Findings of the Study

The findings of this research study were related to the specific objectives. The first objective was "To determine the relative importance of certain identified tasks of supervisors and to determine how well these tasks are being performed." Respondents checked five-point scales to reflect their appraisals of both importance and performance of 170 supervisory tasks. A value of 5 at the top of the scale as "very important" was interpreted as being of greatest importance and a similar value of 5 on performance reflecting "well done" was interpreted as being performed at the highest possible level. On this basis, the two values were reasonably comparable.

Mean scores of importance on the zero to five scale ranged from a high of 4.84 on the Personnel Development and Management task, "Arrange for candidates to visit county faculty members", to the lowest mean score of 2.49 for the Relationship task, "Serve on water development, migrant labor, and other designated committees". With the 247 faculty members expressing their value judgments on the 170 specific tasks of the Ohio Extension supervisor in a range extending over nearly half the zero to five scale of valu s, it is apparent that the tasks are perceived to be of differing importance. For twenty-three tasks, mean scores of importance were above 4.50 and for only two tasks were the mean scores below 3.00. Relative importance was reflected within the broad range.

The respondents' perceptions of performance were reflected in the mean score for each task. The highest performance mean score of 4.78 was for the Personnel Development and Management task, "Present candidate to County Extension Advisory Committees". The

lowest performance mean score was 1.69 for the Program Development and Evaluation task, "Observe agents teach." For five tasks, the mean scores of performance were lower than the lowest mean score of importance. It was observed that total faculty respondents consistently scored performance at a lower value than importance. For only ten of the 170 tasks, were the performance mean scores equal to or larger than the mean scores of importance. Of these ten tasks, five were perceived as being of great importance, three of medium importance and two of little importance.

The second objective, "To determine how the various Ohio Cooperative Extension Service faculty groups perceive the importance and performance of the various tasks expected of the supervisors", was at the very core of the study.

The third objective, "To determine whether employment position, tenure in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, age, most advanced degree attained, or major area of study, had an observed influence or effect upon the perception of the importance and performance of supervisory tasks", related closely to the second objective. Observable differences in perception of importance and performance of supervisory tasks as reflected in mean scores by the various respondent groups were evident. While the results did not explain cause and effect, they did demonstrate observable differences both in the mean scores and the ranks of mean scores for both importance and performance by the various respondent groups.

Major observable differences were by employment position of the respondents. Perception by the agent groups of ten differed measurably

from that of the supervisory and administrative groups. Major lacks of agreement are highlighted below. Minor differences in mean scores and ranks of scores were prevalent.

The highest mean scores of importance were 5.0 and were provided by the supervisory respondents on three tasks, "Conduct annual individual counselling session on performance and professional development", "Recommend and justify salary adjustments", and "Counsel on minimal performance for needed improvement, transfer, termination, or retirement". Other than by supervisors, the highest mean importance score of 4.91 was by the area agents on the task, "Arrange for candidates to visit county faculty members". The lowest mean importance scores were 2.22 and 2.24 by the 4-H agents and agricultural agents respectively on the task, "Serve on water development, migrant labor, and other designated committees".

All respondent groups gave the highest mean scores to the task, "Present candidate to County Extension Advisory Committee"; scores ranged from 4.73 by administration to 4.92 by supervisors. The lowest mean scores of performance were by the home economics agents with .97 on the program development and evaluation task, "Observe agents teach", and 1.21 on the related personnel development and management task, "Observe each faculty member in a teaching role at least once a year". All respondent groups had very low mean scores of performance on those same two tasks with the area agents and agricultural agents responding to both items at a level above other respondent groups.

The compilation of information concerning the respondents provided facts of interest not readily available concerning the Extension faculty. The study encompassed the total field faculty of county and area Extension agents, plus the supervisory and administrative faculty. For this group, only 42 per cent had more than ten years of tenure in the Extension Service; 44 per cent had five or fewer years of tenure. Forty-one per cent indicated they had previous experience in the teaching profession. Nearly 90 per cent were age 55 or less. Fifty-one per cent had education to at least the Master's degree level. Almost 60 per cent of those providing information on the subject matter major of their most advanced degree had that degree in either adult, agricultural, extension, or home economics education.

This accumulation of facts concerning the present Ohio Cooperative Extension Service faculty lends credibility to the often heard statements concerning the viable, young, but experienced, and well-trained faculty members currently providing the Extension educational thrust.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from interpretation of the findings in the study.

1. The importance of supervisory tasks was perceived quite differently by groups of Ohio Cooperative Extension Service faculty when grouped by:

   a. Position of employment in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service

   b. Tenure in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service

   c. Age

   d. Level of employees' educational accomplishment

   e. Subject matter major of the most advanced degree attained.

2. The performance of supervisory tasks was perceived quite differently by groups of Ohio Cooperative Extension Service faculty when grouped by:

   a. Position of employment in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service

   b. Tenure in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service

   c. Age

   d. Level of employees' educational accomplishment

   e. Subject matter major of the most advanced degree attained.

3. Extension faculty consistently scored importance of supervisory tasks higher than they scored the performance of those tasks. Perhaps this indicated their desire for higher performance.

4. Administrators often ranked importance of tasks higher than other employee groups, which may reflect their continuing emphasis on the importance of the supervisors' role.

5. No task was rated unimportant by a majority of the respondents, thus indicating that most respondents actually recognized importance but at varying levels.

6. The majority of the respondents rated every task as being performed, although at widely varying levels.

7. The possibility of role conflict existed since administrators and supervisors did not perceive the individual tasks, and thus the total job of the supervisor, the same as the agents supervised.

8. Need exists for improved understanding and recognition of the role of the supervisor so that all employee groups may perceive the duties, responsibilities, and tasks as nearly alike as possible.

9. Supervisors need to adjust their efforts in order to fulfill the expectations of agents supervised and their role as mutually understood.

10. The varying needs and interests of agent groups must be recognized by the supervisors as they perform individual tasks with the agent clientele.

11. Some tasks, like "Counsel with agents on program needs and direction", and "Develop understanding of policy on salary increases based on merit", which ranked quite high in importance were ranked quite low on performance; this could suggest need for increased effort toward these tasks by supervisors.

12. Some tasks, like "Interact with other supervisors and assistant directors regarding program planning", and "Insist on agents reporting results to county Extension advisory committees", which ranked quite low in importance, received high ranking on performance; this could indicate misguided effort in performance.

The writer made several recommendations which were based upon the findings of the study, his survey of related research, and his own professional judgment and experiences. Among them were the following:

1. An in-service educational program for all Extension employee groups should be conducted to help them understand the role of the supervisor.

2. Before making any changes in the area supervisor job description or before implementing any in-service educational program relating to the area supervisor's role, the findings of this study should be reviewed by Extension administrators and supervisors.

3. Extension supervisors should critically evaluate their behavior in relation to the four distinct groups they supervise in light of the study's findings.

4. Extension supervisors should emphasize improving their performance of the supervisory tasks related to program development and evaluation.

5. An understanding of the supervisor's role should be a part of in-service education for new Extension faculty.

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